

Spotlight on Agile Planning



Planning should be quick, engaging and motivating. Generally, if a team finds planning boring and tunes out it means they're not finding it relevant or don't feel involved.

Cole, R. and Scotcher, E. (2015)

Agile Planning in Context

Formal processes and extensive documentation in traditional project management ensure that projects are defined before any work starts, and the Project Manager is clearly accountable for the success or failure of the project.

Although extremely popular and useful, particularly for very large projects, traditional project management does have limitations in some circumstances; it is slow, it may be difficult to revert back to a previous step in the life cycle, and there is not always enough space in the plan to take account of customer feedback or to customise or 'fine tune' the final output.

Agile planning takes a different approach that turns the weaknesses of the traditional approach into strengths by providing a more flexible, transparent, and iterative approach that can accommodate last minute changes and feedback to make the customer the focal point of the planning.

Scrums, Product Backlog Items, and Sprints.

Agile planning has its own terminology, and three of the most important concepts are scrums, product backlog items, and sprints:

Scrum

"Scrum is a process framework that has been used to manage work on complex products since the early 1990s. Scrum is not a process, technique, or definitive method. Rather, it is a framework within which you can employ various processes and techniques. Scrum makes clear the relative efficacy of your product management and work techniques so that you can continuously improve the product, the team, and the working environment." Schwaber, K. and Sutherland, J. (2017)

The scrum framework is widely used in software development, although agile techniques are applicable to other types of projects such as research, sales, and change management projects.

The 'Scrum Team' comprises a Product Owner, the Development Team, and a Scrum Master. They are self-organizing and cross-functional to "optimize flexibility, creativity, and productivity", and they 'deliver products iteratively and incrementally, maximizing opportunities for feedback.' Schwaber, K. and Sutherland, J. (2017)

Product Backlog Item

"A product backlog is a list of the new features, changes to existing features, bug fixes, infrastructure changes or other activities that a team may deliver in order to achieve a specific outcome." Agile Alliance (2020)

The Product Owner is generally responsible for maintaining the product backlog, usually expressed in physical form as user story maps (where a user story is a feature or functionality described from an end-user's perspective) or Kanban board, or electronically on a spreadsheet.

This is a dynamic process that allows the team to prioritise on important changes and remove items that do not add value or progress to the desired outcome.

Sprint

“Sprint planning is an event in the Scrum framework where the team determines the product backlog items they will work on during that sprint and discusses their initial plan for completing those product backlog items. Teams may find it helpful to establish a sprint goal and use that as the basis by which they determine which product backlog items they work on during that sprint.” Agile Alliance (2020)

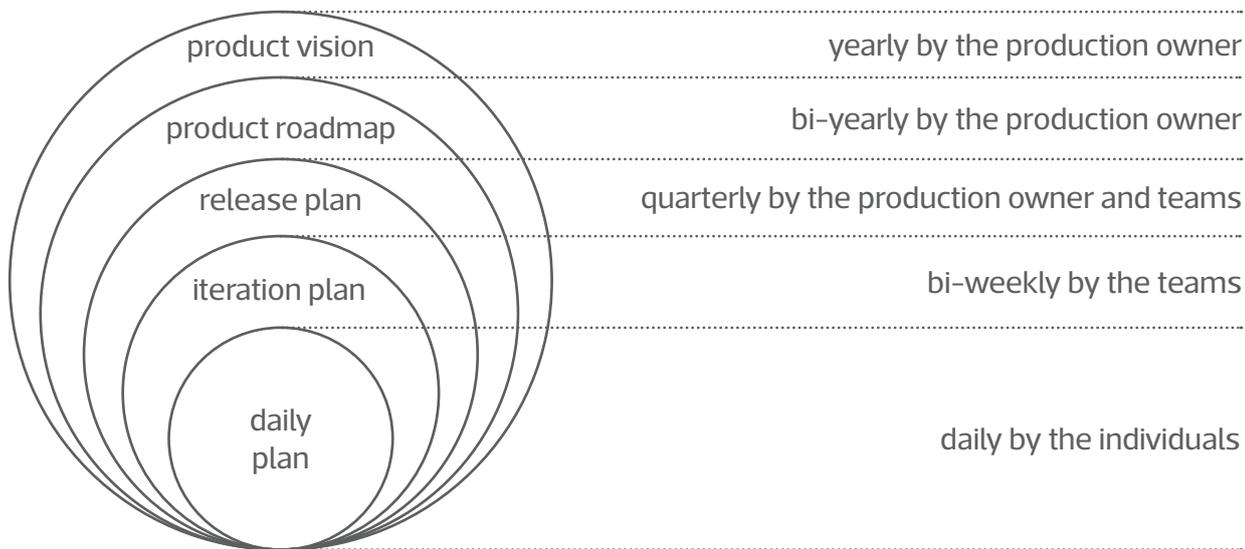
That is:



ProductPlan (2020)

Upper limits should be set by the team for each planning session, usually one or two hours for every week of sprint time, and Schwaber, K. and Sutherland, J. (2017) contend that sprints be limited to one calendar month, with a new sprint starting immediately after the conclusion of the previous sprint.

Bringing It All together: The Agile Planning Onion



Smits, H. (2006)

The Agile Planning Onion represents five levels of Agile Planning, where each layer establishes timeframes and ownership and sets the goals for the layers below.

Agile Teams will be involved at the tactical levels of Release, Iteration and Daily to achieve the product goal, which will be based on customer needs.

References

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